



PROVIDER BULLETIN

PB 04-14

THIS ISSUE

**Resources
to assist with safe,
timely and appropriate
return-to-work**

TO:

Chiropractors
Medical Physicians
MD/DO Clinics
Nurses and Nurse Practitioners
Occupational Therapists
Osteopathic Physicians
Physical Therapists
Physician Assistants
Providers
Vocational Rehabilitation

CONTACT:

Provider Hotline
1-800-848-0811
From Olympia 902-6500

Rich Wilson, CRC
Health Services Analysis
PO Box 44326
Olympia, WA 98504-4322
(360) 902-5447
wiri235@Lni.wa.gov

Robert D. Mootz, DC
Office of the Medical Director
PO Box 44321
Olympia, WA 98504-4321
(360) 902-4998

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Purpose

Helping injured workers return-to-work safely and promptly is a high-priority for the Department of Labor and Industries. Appropriate return-to-work helps facilitate recovery, helps prevent a worker from becoming deconditioned, and reduces financial impacts on both workers and employers. New materials and resources are now available from the department to enhance return to work efforts. The Early Return-To-Work (ERTW) initiative began in April 2004 and will help ensure that providers, workers, employers, and department staff work together and act quickly in order to achieve the best possible outcomes. This program does not affect self-insured employers.

What are the major changes to the way that L&I is addressing return-to-work?

The department has implemented two new efforts to enhance understanding and attention to return-to-work issues and speed return-to-work benefits for workers.

1. Local Early Return-To-Work (ERTW) Teams: When an injured worker has received State Fund time-loss benefits for 14 days, his or her claim is assigned to an Early Return-To-Work (ERTW) team in one of L&I's local offices. The team works with the injured worker, employer and medical provider to explore return-to-work possibilities as early as it is medically appropriate.

2. New return-to-work resource materials: A new publication is available for providers, the *Attending Doctor's Return-To-Work Desk Reference* which along with the pull out section of this bulletin provides a handy resource for best practices to facilitate return-to-work. Information regarding who to contact at the department to obtain assistance, plus sample forms and ideas to enhance return-to-work are included. The department has also developed an informational pamphlet for injured workers, *Getting Back to Work, It's Your Job, and Your Future*. In addition, a new publication for employers will be available soon, the *Employers Return-To-Work Guide*.

Why is Return-to-work so important?

Numerous studies have identified connections between duration of a workers' compensation claim and long-term loss of a worker's earning power. The longer injured workers remain off work, the harder it is for them to return to their original job and wage. Partial wage replacement (time-loss) benefits do not offset a full wage. Besides physical deconditioning that may occur while being off work, workers may risk loss of benefits such as retirement or health insurance, and see their career advancement goals impacted. In addition, when companies have workers on time-loss, their workers compensation premium rates are affected. Timely and appropriate return-to-work is in everyone's best interest.

Who are the ERTW team members and what do they do?

Members of the Early Return-To-Work teams are staff at local L&I offices located throughout the state. They have expertise in several fields and include Vocational Services Consultants, Therapist Consultants and Occupational Nurse Consultants. These specialists will receive information about claims that have 14 days of consecutive time loss and may directly contact workers, employers, and providers about ways to promote return-to-work in a medically appropriate manner. Customer service staff at local L&I offices will assist the consultants by making initial phone calls to the injured worker and employer.

How will these changes affect the treating provider?

Treating doctors and ARNPs may frequently be contacted much earlier than they have in the past to help identify appropriate work options for the injured worker. The doctor or ARNP may be asked to identify work restrictions and abilities, and review job descriptions for consideration of release for work. Many strategies are available to identify and develop appropriate work during recovery from the effects of an occupational injury or illness. Examples can include:

- Working shorter hours
- Performing an alternative job
- Modifying the worker's previous job

The treating doctor may also request special resources for their patient's return-to-work efforts by contacting the local L&I office. Return-to-work resources for providers can be found in the Quick-RTW-Reference pull out located in the center of this bulletin. More detailed information for enhancing return-to-work is available in the *Attending Doctor's Return-To-Work Desk Reference*.



Getting Your Patient Back To Work

Quick Reference Companion for the
Attending Doctor's Return-To-Work Desk Reference

Doctors are crucial partners in facilitating return-to-work as well as clinical recovery

- Doctors are “first responders” during the period when occupational health interventions are the most effective
- Patients rely on doctors when forming expectations, as well as for guidance during their recovery
- Doctors are usually the first to see barriers to recovery and impediments to return-to-work
- Doctors set the stage for teamwork with the worker, employer, and the system
- Time loss compensation payments only offset a portion of lost wages; they do not fully replace them. Assisting your patient return to their job helps preserve their income, benefits and career standing
- Delays in return-to-work can contribute to deconditioning and loss of motivation
- Returning to work at the job and employer of injury can preserve your patient’s seniority and their related job benefits, such as health insurance and retirement benefits

Important practices for facilitating successful recovery and return-to-work

- See workers as soon as possible
- Complete and submit the Report of Industrial Injury or Occupational Disease form quickly and accurately to assure quick adjudication and provision of benefits to which your patient is entitled
- Set goals and expectation for clinical improvement and return-to-work on the first visit. Help your patient understand the important role they play in their own recovery and return to work. Provide your patient with a copy of the brochure “*Getting Back To Work, Its Your Job and Your Future*”
- Work with your patient and their employer early to find accommodations and modifications to work duties when a full return is not possible
- When accommodation is not available, contact the department (e.g., customer service specialists in your local L&I office and/or the claim manager) for assistance
- Regularly follow up on your patient’s progress, being sure to determine your patient’s abilities, and document their progress toward clinical and return-to-work goals
- Identify any impediments to return to work, and obtain consultations from appropriate experts and department staff to help develop strategies to resolve these impediments

FOR MORE INFORMATION

L & I Publications

- Provider’s Return-To-Work Desk Reference (F200-002-000)
- Employer’s Return-To-Work Desk Reference (F200-003-000)
- Getting Back to Work... It’s Your Job and your Future (F200-001-000)
- Attending Doctor’s Handbook (F252-004-000)
- Chiropractic Physician’s Guide (F252-005-000)
- Worker’s Guide to Industrial Insurance Benefits (F242-104-000)
- Provider Bulletins and Provider Updates (<http://www.lni.wa.gov/ClaimsInsurance/Providers/>)

Publications are available free of charge from the L&I Warehouse, P.O. Box 44843, Olympia, WA 98504-4843

Useful Websites

Information for Providers: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/ClaimsInsurance/Providers/> _____

Fee schedules, continuing education, provider bulletins and more

L&I Ergonomics Idea Bank: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/KeepSafe/ReduceHazards/ErgoBank/>

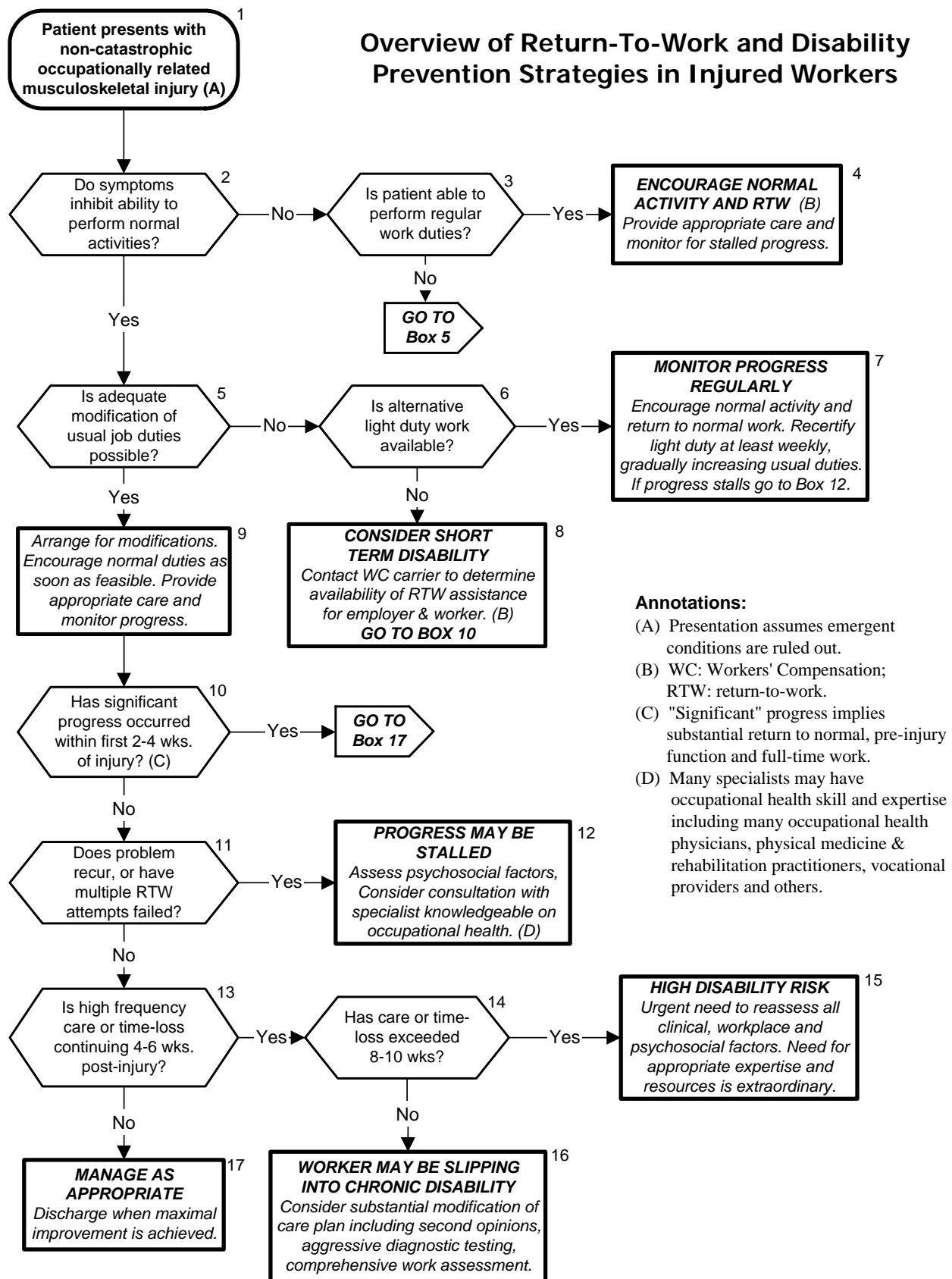
Searchable collection of ideas that may help you reduce exposure to awkward postures, high hand force, repetitive motions, lifting, vibration and other risk factors for work-related musculoskeletal disorders in your workplace.

US Department of Labor Job Accommodation Network: <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/>

Free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities

L&I Provider Hotline: 1-800-547-8367

Overview of Return-To-Work and Disability Prevention Strategies in Injured Workers



L&I RESOURCES TO ASSIST IN HELPING YOUR PATIENT GET BACK TO WORK

Labor and Industries has a number of staff members available to provide assistance to employers, workers, and providers in the return to work process. This sheet is designed to provide general information and assistance. The claims manager must pre-authorize and approve benefits and services for individual claims. A list of resources and contact numbers for services available in local L&I service locations can be found on the last page.

Vocational Services Consultants help employers establish policies and procedures for return-to-work programs and develop return-to-work options for injured workers. They may also provide job analysis and job modification assistance for workers and employers. Specific assistance and information may also be available with job modifications, loss of earning power, identifying transitional return to work opportunities, and documenting transitional or gradual return-to-work opportunities.

Therapist Consultants provide on-site evaluations to enable injured workers to remain on the job through Job Modification of equipment, tools, or tasks. They analyze job tasks and the physical requirement of jobs, including ergonomics, to develop strategies to reduce risk of injury. Therapists assist with information about the Job Modification benefit.

Occupational Nurse Consultants assist in medically difficult claims to ensure that injured workers receive the appropriate care. Nurses also assist attending physicians, providing information on department policies, services and benefits relating to returning workers to work.

Risk Management Specialists provide help in managing the risk of on-the-job accidents and illnesses in order to reduce and control workers' compensation costs for workers and employers. Training and assistance is provided in a variety of areas, including understanding premiums and experience rating, the financial impact of claims on industrial insurance premiums and the employee's contribution (through payroll deduction) to those premiums. Development or revision of programs for workplace safety, claims management, and establishing return-to-work programs may also be provided.

Retrospective Rating (Retro) is an optional financial incentive program, which rewards employers who minimize their industrial insurance costs. **Financial Incentive Coordinators** in the Retro program offer assistance to employers focusing on the Retro program, early and safe return to work and understanding the workers' compensation system.

Retro contacts: Tumwater Central Office 360-902-4839 or 360 902-4851

Customer Service Specialists are a source of information about policies and services related to industrial insurance claims, as well as other Department of Labor & Industries programs and services. They review and provide information and status on individual claims, facilitate communication between workers, employers, claims managers and all other resources listed above.

Claim Managers are responsible for all decisions on the claim. Claim managers authorize services and benefits, including medical treatment, time-loss compensation, loss of earning power, job modification, and vocational rehabilitation. The Claim Manager's name and phone number are on each order and notice of decision, or the Customer Service Specialist can provide contact information.

For automated claims information: 1-800- 547-8357

Department of Labor & Industries

Regional Return-To-Work Resources

Counties Typically Served	Office	Customer Service Specialists	Vocational Services Consultants	Therapist Consultants	Occupational Nurse Consultants	Risk Management Specialists
Snohomish & Island Counties	Everett	425 290 1300	425 290 1383	425 290 1382	425 290 1331	425 290 1364
Skagit County	Mount Vernon	360 416 3000	360 416 3043	425 290 1382		360 647 7319
Whatcom & San Juan Counties	Bellingham	360 647 7300	360 647 7337	425 290 1382		360 647 7319
King County	Tukwila	206 835 1000	206 835 1032	206 835 1020	206 515 2812	206 515 2832
	Seattle	206 515 2800	206 515 2833	206 835 1020		206 515 2832
	Bellevue	425 990 1400		206 835 1020		425 990 1457
Pierce County	Tacoma	253 596 3947	253 596 3878	253 596 3880	253 596 3904	253 596 3925
Kitsap County	Bremerton	360 415 4000		253 596 3880		360 415 4011
Clallam & Jefferson Counties	Port Angeles	360 417 2700		253 596 3880		360 415 4011
Grays Harbor & Mason Counties	Aberdeen	360 533 8200	360 533 8217	360 902 6768		360 902 4842 or 360 902 6762
Thurston, Lewis & Pacific Counties	Tumwater	360 902 5799	360 902 6780	360 902 6768		
Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Skamania Counties	Longview	360 575 6900	360 575 6931	360 902 6768		360 896 2393
Clark, & Klickitat Counties	Vancouver	360 896 2320				
Okanogan County	Okanogan	509 826 7345	509 764 6939	509 454 3874	509 454 3729	509 454 3779 Or 509 454 3785
Chelan & Douglas Counties	East Wenatchee	509 886 6500				
Grant, & Kittitas Counties	Moses Lake	509 764 6900				
Yakima, & Benton Counties	Yakima	509 454 3700				
Franklin & Adams Counties	Kennewick	509 735 0100				
Walla Walla, & Columbia Counties	Walla Walla	509 527 4437	509 454 3780	509 324 2550	509 324 2559	509 324 2546 Or 509 324 2623
Lincoln & Spokane Counties	Spokane	509 324 2613	509 324 2610 Or 509 324 2629			
Ferry, Stevens, & Pend Oreille Counties	Colville	509 684 7417				
Whitman, Garfield, & Asotin Counties	Pullman	509 334 5296				

Will nurse practitioners be affected by the new return-to-work efforts?

Recent legislation has authorized nurse practitioners to function in attending doctor roles in workers' compensation, specifically indicating that ARNPs participate and cooperate with return-work efforts.

What are the expected outcomes from the new return-to-work efforts?

L&I expects that more injured workers will be able to return-to-work sooner, and that these workers will avoid the negative consequences of long-term disability. Those workers who cannot return to their employer will receive vocational assessment services much earlier than in the past. In addition, workers who qualify for and are in need of additional services may be able to receive benefits sooner.

How do these new efforts compare or change with existing L&I programs such as Early Vocational Intervention?

The Early Return-To-Work effort involves staff at local L&I offices that know the community and the businesses. The program will help identify potential barriers that may arise, much earlier in a claim than has occurred in the past. Research has shown that earlier attention to return-to-work and communication between workers, their doctor, and their employer can help foster appropriate and safe return-to-work options and can help reduce the disability that workers may face over the longer term. The department will continue to refer some workers to private vocational counselors for early intervention, assessment and/or plan development services, depending on the outcome of the early return-to-work effort.

Who will contact me about my patient's return-to-work?

Many individuals may have a role in your patient's return-to-work including the patient's employer, their representatives, other providers, private vocational counselors, and department staff. Proactive employers may contact your office in an effort to help facilitate returning their employee to work. A vocational counselor may contact you in regard to their referral assignment. Please continue to work with these parties.

Does the ERTW effort affect how I need to work with claim managers?

No. The claim manager's role is unchanged and doctors should continue to work with them as they always have. The local ERTW staff will have access to the claim file and will record information there about ERTW actions taken. Claim managers will have complete access to this information.

How can I get more information?

Please see the center pullout section of this bulletin for a listing of key considerations about appropriate, safe and timely return-to-work as well as a listing of department contacts and resources available to assist doctors and ARNPS.